

Trade luncheon urges Inland firms to tap import assets for exports

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Inland businesses would be wise to take a weak dollar and turn it into exporting lemonade, say regional business leaders, who encouraged use of the area's already well-established supply chain of airports, docks and railways to do so.

About 200 business leaders and international trade representatives gathered at a Riverside luncheon launching the second annual World Trade Month to hear updates on statewide strategies for encouraging trade and the current economy.

"The No. 1 issue for trade ... is the state of the U.S. economy," said Jon D. Haveman, founding partner of Beacon Economics and one of the luncheon's two keynote speakers. The other was Garrett Ashley, the state's undersecretary for international trade.

The increase in exporting to countries capitalizing on the weak U.S. dollar has been a sign of optimism for economists, but it won't be enough to stave off a recession, Haveman said.

For exports to compensate for diminished consumer spending, annual export growth needs to amount to at least 40 percent, a lofty figure, he said, adding, "Exports are not the ticket."

Locally, Inland leaders said businesses would be wise to offset current economic conditions by thinking globally and exporting more.

Larry Sharp, president and chief executive officer of Arrowhead Credit Union and chairman of World Trade Month Inland Empire, said the region's role in the global supply chain too often has been as an importer. Greater efforts should be made to export more products and services, including offering consulting expertise abroad, he said.

He said the region would do well to use its hubs at March Air Reserve Base, LA/Ontario International Airport, San Bernardino International Airport and the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville to start sending planes that arrive with imported goods back with cargo hulls filled with Inland goods.

"We've got a wonderful opportunity," he said.

Among countries represented at the luncheon were consular representatives of Canada, Brazil, Switzerland, Romania, Poland, Turkey, the Philippines and Indonesia.

California remains one of the key markets for Turkey's textiles and natural stones.

"Everything starts here," said Selen Eryuce, commercial attaché in Turkey's consulate in Los Angeles. "If you can sell here, you can sell anywhere."

The city of Riverside recognized two companies for their importing and exporting prowess.

Tent producer International E-Z Up Inc. was named Importer of the Year. The company, which imports materials from China, Taiwan and South Korea, moved to Riverside in 1995.

American Quality Tools, a Riverside maker of cutting tools and drill bits with locations in Bangalore and Singapore, was chosen as Exporter of the Year.

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